Christian Register.

DEVOTED TO UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY, SOUND MORALS, LITERATURE, AND NEWS.

"AND WHY EVEN OF YOURSELVES JUDGE YE NOT WHAT IS RIGHT?"——LUKE xii. 57.

VOL. XI. BOSTON, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1832. NO. 44.

[Our readers will not, we are confident, think they have any reason to complain that we have permitted all the columns of this week's Register to be filled with the proceedings of the A. U. A.]

PROCEEDINGS OF THE

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

RESPECTING THE GENERAL AGENCY.

At a meeting of the *American Unitarian Association*, holden on the thirty first day of May, A. D. 1832, at five o'clock, P. M. at the Vestry in Berry Street; Rev. AARON BANCROFT, President of the Association, in the Chair:—

The object of the meeting was stated to be to consider whether it is expedient to appoint a General Agent of the Association, and what measures shall be taken to raise funds for his support: after a full and fair discussion of the subject, it was

Voted, That the Association will proceed to the election of a General Agent by ballot.

Upon receiving and counting the votes it appeared that Rev. EZRA STILES GANNETT, of Boston, was unanimously chosen.

A meeting of gentlemen was afterwards held at which several resolutions were passed, approving the object. A General Committee, consisting of the Executive Committee and two gentlemen from each parish in the city, directed a Sub-Committee to prepare a Circular to the several Societies and Auxiliary Associations, which was adopted as follows:—

CIRCULAR.

We have been directed by a meeting of the friends of Liberal Christianity to address you in behalf of a projected enterprise of the American Unitarian Association,—an enterprise, which seems to them and to us of vital consequence to the interests of religion in our community, and to which we are therefore solicitous to draw your favorable regard.

The state of the times, and the demand of the public mind for religious instruction, seem to render it the duty of the friends of free inquiry and wholesome religious influences, to exert themselves more strenuously than ever in behalf of enlightened views of the Christian faith. The American Unitarian Association, desiring to discharge something of this duty, has proposed to appoint and support some individual, whose known character and standing shall insure confidence and respect, whose office it shall be to act as the representative of the Association before the public, to superintend its publications, to conduct its correspondence, to answer the calls which are made from every part of the country for information, advice, and assistance, to visit all portions of the land for the purpose of ascertaining their religious condition and wants, of preaching the truth, encouraging societies for worship, and opening means of communication and fellowship. There is reason to believe that such a messenger would be extensively useful in correcting error, removing misapprehension and prejudice, repressing infidelity, uniting and confirming believers, and erecting permanent religious establishments in places where they do not now exist. It is especially thought that he may do good in the great field of the West,—a region, the importance of whose moral condition to the future welfare of the nation, cannot be too highly estimated; in which it has been ascertained that there are not far from two million persons unconnected with any religious denomination, and where, consequently, there must be opportunity to gather many congregations. Having these objects in view, the project in question is not to be regarded merely as a movement in favor of our own denomination; but as the discharge of a solemn duty, which, as Christians and patriots, we owe to those portions of our country which are less blessed than we are with Christian institutions.

This object has long been contemplated by the Executive Committee of the American Unitarian Association. It has been discussed at several public meetings, has been examined and approved by many of the most intelligent, judicious, and influential religious men, and has been regarded with increased favor the more it has been considered. Those who have most thoroughly weighed the design, are the most entirely convinced that to accomplish it is a great and pressing duty.

Having been thus aided by the counsels of many minds, the Executive Committee of the Association is ready to commission such an Agent, as soon as the funds shall be provided for his support. These funds must be of such an amount as shall offer a suitable salary to a competent man, and enable him to meet the expenses of travelling. That any person may be induced to accept so responsible an office, it is necessary that the Association should be able to secure to him the permanent payment of an adequate stipend. As the present income of the Association is not equal to this expense, it is proposed to raise the requisite sum by means of donations and subscriptions collected for the purpose. We respectfully and earnestly solicit your cooperation and aid. We beg of you to give the subject your immediate consideration, and convey to the Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, the earliest possible information respecting the subscriptions and donations which you may be able to devote to it.

We are, respectfully,

HENRY WARE, JR.
WILLIAM SULLIVAN.
JOSEPH STORY.

Committees were nominated in the country, and the following Circular was directed to them:—

CIRCULAR.

Gentlemen,—The American Unitarian Association have elected Rev. EZRA STILES GANNETT to be their permanent Agent, and have addressed the Circular, which accompanies this communication to the several Churches and Auxiliary Associations, requesting their aid in procuring the necessary funds for the support of this Agency. We have the honor to inform you, that you have been appointed a Committee in behalf of the Association for ——————————; and we request your cooperation in calling the attention of the community to the benevolent purposes to be accomplished by this measure. We feel that the cause of truth and Liberal Christianity has always a claim to the warmest affection and best services of its friends, but we are still more deeply impressed with the conviction, that the circumstances of the present times, give to the call of duty a more earnest, solemn, and impressive tone, than at any former period. It is the decided opinion of those among us, who have the best means of observation and upon whose judgment we most confidently rely, that many have become disaffected to the form in which religion has been presented to them, and by these means to religion itself; that the zeal which has been manifested to spread a feverish excitement, and establish doctrines which seem irrational, has been the occasion of much concealed and some avowed infidelity. A great trust and high duty has thus devolved upon Liberal Christians of meeting this exigency of the public mind, and of doing something to prevent the evils of its present state; upon them, more than any other denomination of Christians, because they may address many with effect, who will listen to no others.

Beside the claims of religion, we seem to owe a duty to our country. The restraints of religion and morality are more important to public happiness among us, than in any other nation. Public opinion, which has been effecting the most portentous changes in the institutions of the old world, establishing, dethroning and restoring dynasties, creating new governments, and modifying the old, withstanding the power of ancient despotisms and military force, is still more formidable here. Here is nothing to oppose its progress, no established orders in Church or State, no ancient and consecrated prejudices, no traditionary and inherited habits and opinions, and if it is misguided, its impulse may be sudden and destructive. Remove for a little while the restraints of religion and morality, and the foundations of social order are shaken, and our fair hopes for ourselves and our children changed to gloomy forebodings. Those who best know the signs of the times, already find causes for apprehension. He must have lived long, who can recollect when infidelity was so open, religious animosity so bitter, and political morality so lax. If others will not permit us to unite our efforts with theirs, shall we not draw closer the bonds of union among ourselves in support of our religious institutions, and the healthy and preserving influences of public morals? To perform with effect these duties to ourselves, and others, to our religion and country, we must cherish and multiply the ties of sympathy and fellowship among our parishes and religious societies. There must be a community of thought, feeling and action among us, whose healthy and invigorating impulses shall reach the most distant individual, and receive in return from every member a reciprocal influence, sustaining and stimulating its efforts. The means of effecting these objects are a General Agency, public meetings, and the press. To provide the first of these, the Association now request your aid, and the warmth of approbation with which their choice has been greeted, proves that the public know the value of the piety, learning and talent, to be devoted to this office. So favored by providence is our situation in this city, that the exertions of our Agent will be principally needed among others, and not among us, and we entertain great expectations of benefit to the cause of Liberal Christianity, from the entire devotion of a single mind, to its general success and developement, free from the interference of those claims, by which both clergy and laity are bound to particular places, and local and professional duties. It will be a centre to which all information is to be collected; where all who are willing to devote a portion of their wealth, influence, or talents to the support of this cause, (and we trust that there are many such,) may find an opportunity for usefulness, and those who need assistance, advice, or sympathy, may receive them according to the extent of our united ability. Should it produce a common feeling among those who have a common cause, corresponding to the importance of its objects and the wants of the community, it will tend to bring about a new era in the history of our religious progress.

We would suggest, that each Committee should add to their numbers those gentlemen, who can aid their exertions by influence, talents and devotion to the cause, divide themselves into sub-committees or appoint local committees for each parish, wherever it may be expedient, and take whatever measures may in their judgment be best adapted to promote the object in view. But there is one measure which we especially recommend; we mean the holding of public meetings for the purpose of addressing the people on this subject. Experience has proved them to be a most powerful means not only for promoting a temporary object, but for the substantial and permanent benefit which our friends may receive from this interchange of feeling, argument and opinion, when the present occasion shall have passed away. They are customary among Unitarians in England, and have been held in this country, in Providence, Worcester, Brattleborough, Concord, Danvers, Hingham, and Cambridgeport, with the best effects. The presence of numbers, the general impulse and sympathy throughout a large audience, persuaded of the same truths and encouraged by the same hopes, give confidence to the timid and hesitating, ripen opinions into principles, excite the passive to exertion and the active to greater and persevering efforts, and impart life and animation to all. We hope that such meetings will be held in every large town, where a sufficient audience can be collected.

We have attempted to express to you our deep sense of the importance of the measure adopted by the Association, but we cannot pretend within these limits, so much as to glance at all the reasons, which persuade us that the time has now come which renders a general and united effort, an imperative duty to ourselves and posterity.

We believe, that in asking your cooperation, we invite you to share with us a high and honorable trust, and we would urge you, by the freedom, knowledge and privileges of Liberal Christianity and the deep responsibility which they impose,—by the dangers both of infidelity and superstition,—by the love of our common country, inherited from ancestors, who thought truth of more value than everything beside, and to be transmitted to children, who are to be influenced for good or evil by our opinions, actions and institutions, to give to our united endeavors the aid of your countenance, talents, influence and exertions.

For the Commitee,

JOHN GRAY ROGERS.

The several gentlemen who consented to serve on Committees in behalf of the Association in the several parishes, and other friends of Liberal Christianity, were invited to meet at the Vestry in Berry Street, on Sunday evening, Oct. 14th,—when among other proceedings, it was

Voted, That we are deeply impressed with the utility and necessity of the appointment of a General Agent of the American Unitarian Association, and heartily concur in the general approbation with which their choice has been received, and that we entertain the greatest expectation of benefit to the cause of Liberal Christianity from the piety, learning and talent to be devoted to the duties of this office.

Voted, That it is expedient that a general public meeting should be held in this city as soon as convenient, for the purpose of addressing the body of Liberal Christians in behalf of the undertaking, &c.

Oct. 23d, 1832. In compliance with the above vote, and by order of the Executive Committee, a public meeting of the A. U. A. was held in the Federal Street Church. Judge STORY, one of the Vice Presidents, took the chair. After prayers by Rev, Mr HARDING, of England, the meeting proceeded to discuss the subject of the proposed General Agency.

Judge ROGERS introduced the subject and stated the measures which had been taken, nearly as follows:—

MR PRESIDENT,—I think that I shall not be accused of exaggeration if I should say that the measure now to be proposed to this meeting is one of the deepest importance to the interests of Liberal Christianity. So great are the benefits to be expected from it, that I had almost said that it is of equal importance with the institution of the Association itself. If this were my own opinion only, I should express it with much diffidence; but this subject has been considered and examined by so many persons upon whose judgment the public rely with confidence, and always with the same result, that there can be no room for hesitation. Changes are necessary in all human institutions to suit them to the ever-changing tide of human affairs. Those institutions which are sufficient for to-day, are entirely insufficient to meet the claims of to-morrow. Thus it is with this association. Its organization is the same which it was in its infant state, and we might as well expect the infant to perform the varied duties and fulfil the multiplied obligations of manhood, as to expect an institution thus organized, to meet the wants of a numerous body of Christians, scattered over a wide extent of country. We have great cause for satisfaction that the present occasion is of this nature; that we have not met this evening to lament together over our diminished influence; that we are not called to consider how we shall circumscribe our exertions within the narrowed circle of our usefulness; or how we should make desperate effort to restore and sustain a sinking cause. We have reason to be grateful, that we have come together because the great cause of truth has extended its influence and commended itself to so many more minds among our fellow-christians; because our small efforts have been so successful in the advancement and diffusion of Liberal Christianity. It is because he who has been faithful over a few things has been made ruler over many things; because he who has been faithful over ten talents has been made ruler over ten cities, that he is to prepare himself for a wider circle of usefulness. A more enlarged sphere of duty is among the rewards of heaven; happy are they to whom it comes on earth; but when it does come, it is intended not merely to excite gratitude, but to stimulate to greater and wider exertion.

This measure is no new thought. It has long been considered and weighed by the individual friends of Liberal Christianity in their own minds, and they have consulted and deliberated much upon it, with each other. The more it has been considered, the more it has commended itself to their judgment. They perceived that the large and continually increasing correspondence of the Association could no longer be conducted by a gentleman who was subject to the paramount claims of a parish or a profession. That there ought to be a constant and easy means of communication among those who seek a mutual object. I do not now speak of written correspondence — but of that interchange of sentiments, opinions and information, so necessary to the success of the common cause. There ought to be a centre of thought, feeling and action, whose influence should everywhere be felt. Like the heart in the body, it should send forth its streams to nourish and build the whole, and receive from every part a reciprocal influence, sustaining and stimulating its efforts. Then they considered the various calls for aid, advice, sympathy and information. How were these to be answered? Must they depend upon the leisure, or rather upon what could be spared from the leisure of a mind devoted to other duties? To meet these claims with the greatest advantage to the applicants and the Association, it seemed necessary that the person who was to answer them should be well acquainted with every part of our country, its situation, circumstances, manners, habits and feelings; not by mere hearsay, but by personal observation. They saw that there were many to take care of the local and partial interests of the cause of truth, but no one to take care of its universal interests; there were many to labor for its advancement within their own circle, but no one to devote himself to its general progress throughout our country; that there were many to take care of the parts, but none to take care of the whole. Here was more than occupation and employment for a single mind. Here was an object for all its cares and thoughts, worthy of its highest powers — upon which it might concentrate and pour forth all its energies. Every means of human usefulness was within the circle of its duties, and everything which could satisfy the brightest hopes and highest ambition of a good man. Local and professional duties were inconsistent with its unlimited claims, and its benefits could only be circumscribed by the capacity of the mind which was to enter upon this mission of almost universal usefulness.

Such were a part of the views of the friends of this measure, but so unusual was any movement of this kind among us, that nothing was done for some time. In the latter part of May last, there was, as usual, a meeting of the Association, at which our friends from all parts of the Commonwealth were present. But this subject was not then considered. They, however, felt that if the occasion should pass by, and they should leave the city without having done anything to carry into effect this important object, they should leave a great duty unperformed. They determined to make some effort at last, to fulfil so pressing an obligation. A meeting of the Association was accordingly called two days after the former, and of course with only one day's notice, and without any notice of its object. At this meeting the measure was proposed for the consideration of all, and some reasons and arguments in its favor were briefly stated. The means for the support of the agency were discussed rather than the expediency of the agency itself, *so immediately did it commend itself to the feelings and understandings of all present*. After a short time it was voted to proceed to the choice of a General Agent of the Association. As soon as this vote was passed I heard all around me, from gentlemen from different parts of the country, and on all sides of the room, only one name repeated as a candidate. Without any consultation at the time, and apparently without any previous concert, (as most of those present had no notice of the object) all minds were directed to one individual, as of all others the most competent to enter upon this great sphere of duty and obligation. The Rev. Mr GANNETT was unanimously elected. When it is thought necessary to create an office of high trust and confidence, and at the same time the public unanimously point out one individual as able to fill so wide a circle of usefulness, so auspicious a coincidence is not to be disregarded in the examination of its expediency.

Three gentlemen were afterwards added to the executive committee, to devise means to procure the necessary funds. This committee invited many gentlemen to meet them a few evenings after, to consult upon the subject. A numerous and respectable meeting was then held in the vestry of this church, and the measure was then presented to them and discussed. It received the same unanimous approbation which it had before experienced at the meeting of the Association. Several other gentlemen were added to the committee, which was afterwards enlarged until it consisted of two gentlemen from each of the Unitarian parishes in the city, besides the executive committee. They appointed a sub-committee (Rev. H. WARE, jr, Hon. W. SULLIVAN and Hon. Judge STORY,) to prepare a circular to be sent to the several parishes and auxiliary associations throughout the Union, and also a sub-committee to report resolves prescribing the means which should be taken to raise the necessary funds. [He then read the circular and resolves before inserted.] About this time the apprehension of that dangerous and dreadful disease which has visited other parts of the country was much felt here, and it will be remembered that there was one period, during which, it produced much effect on the public mind. It was thought that this was not a proper time to lay any measure before the public, and there was also another obstacle to our progress, the absence of many from the city during the summer, who could best aid us in our undertaking. These considerations induced the committee to delay all further movements until autumn. About the middle of September the circulars were sent to the several religious societies and associations, and committees were appointed in all the counties in this State, in most of those in Maine and New Hampshire, and in many other parts of our country, to act in behalf of the Association on this subject. Another circular was also addressed to the committees. The measures under the direction of these committees are now in progress in different parts of the country, and as far as there has been opportunity to learn, the accounts of their efforts and success are of the most encouraging nature. Our friends in the country feel the necessity and appreciate the benefits of this agency, and are willing by their exertions and contributions to aid it according to their ability. But by thus calling upon others to assist us in effecting this object, we have in fact pledged ourselves to use all our exertions, and they may reasonably expect from us all, that our greater wealth and more abundant means will enable us to do for the common cause. I doubt not, we shall fulfil these expectations. As the subject had now been suffered to lie dormant in this city for several months, it was thought expedient to invite several gentlemen in each parish, who had consented to serve as committees in behalf of the Association in their several parishes, and several other friends of Liberal Christianity, to meet and give themselves another opportunity to examine the expediency of the measure. This meeting was held in the vestry of this church, on the evening of the Sunday before the last, and was equally large with the former. The subject was again presented, and again met with the same ready and unanimous approbation. [The resolves of the last meeting were now read.] We therefore present this measure to your attention, recommended by the private consideration and judgment of many independent individuals, and by their consultations and deliberations with each other — sanctioned by a vote of the Association, consisting at that time of gentlemen from all parts of the country — by the unanimous approbation of two meetings of gentlemen in this city, composed chiefly of different persons and held at the distance of some months from each other, by the general voice of our brethren in the country, expressed both at meetings and by individuals. With such recommendations, it may claim at least a candid and patient hearing from this audience.

We ask their attention while we endeavor, by the lips of those whom they are accustomed to hear with respect and confidence, to prove to them its necessity and utility and importance to the cause of Liberal Christianity. We ask them to listen, while we shall satisfy them that it is not merely a sectarian measure, but has higher claims, and a better object and aim. We shall exhibit to them the evidence of its necessity in the great field of the West; a part of our country, in which, if the public institutions of religion, and the wholesome influences of morality are suffered to decay, the effects will be severely felt by us in the results of our general government. They will see, that this is the best means to extend and perpetuate the cause of truth and religious freedom, among the homes and the churches of our own happy New England. That it is a contribution from our denomination to the fulfilment of those obligations which every body of Christians owes to the community; a testimony of our interest in the wholesome restraints of religion and morality, and the foundations of social order — that the dangers and evils of that popular infidelity which is springing up around us, give to "the call of duty a more solemn, earnest and impressive tone, than at any former period." We ask for these subjects a candid and careful examination. Parents are interested in this. When they have educated their children, and even provided for their maintenance, they have not done all. Many as well-educated and provided for, have fallen a prey to bad influences, and are outcasts from society. Man is too much the creature of circumstance. They have not done all, if they have done nothing to spread around a healthy moral atmosphere, to surround them with the same influences and institutions from which they have received so much happiness and improvement. This is the best legacy which they can leave to their children. We would speak to the aged, that they may add another benefit to the fruits of a well-spent life, and leave behind them a monument of their care for posterity. We ask them, if this measure commends itself to their understanding, to give to it the testimony of their aged experience. The young have a deep interest here. The institutions, which we now found, are to affect them for good or evil, perhaps through a long life. We ask the attention of the rich, while we endeavor to fence round their property with the strongest defences of which it is capable — I mean religious institutions and public morals. Without these restraints, those, who want, will desire the possessions of those who have, and the arm of the law would be too weak to coerce them without the aid of despotic power. Let them not think, that because general intelligence and the progress of the human mind in the arts and sciences, and all its thousand paths, have raised this fair and prosperous city in a spot, which was once a savage hunting ground, that these alone can preserve and perpetuate these institutions. Mere intelligence is not safety. God has erected a monument in the history of the past, to warn all future generations of this truth. I allude to the French revolution, merely to state (what has been so often remarked), that there never was a time in France, in which general intelligence was so great, and the mind operated with such a restless and feverish energy, as in the time of the greatest danger. I will barely refer to that part of these evils which reached our own observation. There were cargoes from that unhappy country thrown on our shores, without an owner, or the name of an owner. The most active and persevering integrity attempted in vain to discover him, or he was found to be one of those unfortunate men, who had fallen in that dreadful struggle; one, who by his fatal experience, had given testimony to the truth, and sealed it with his own blood, that amid the greatest mental activity and intelligence, without the restraints of religion and morality, prosperity is itself a danger. We ask the influence of those who can do little for us by pecuniary contributions. Their property is the treasury of kind affections and generous feelings in the bosom of their brethren. We would do something to increase and perpetuate these. We ask the

attention of all the lovers of good order and good government; of all the friends of Liberal Christianity. It has been said that liberality is another name for indifference. We have told the world that this is not so; that what we believed to be truth was as dear to us, as the opinions of others are to them, though we have felt less the narrow influence of sects. We have also said that this measure was of the greatest importance. We stand thus before our brethren of all denominations. They know what efforts they can make for measures important to them, and truths which are sacred to their consciences. If we make these professions, they will expect as much of us. By exertions for this object, we shall show them that liberality does not mean indifference; that a man may be liberal to the faith of others, yet devotedly attached to his own; that truth is as dear to us as to any, and we will make for it as great sacrifices and exertions; and that we can pursue a good object by good means, with energy and effect, without the spur and impulse of sectarianism. All men are interested that these truths should be proved, and we, still more deeply than others.

For all these and many other reasons, we would urge upon this audience the claim which this subject has, to a fair examination. We do not ask them to believe without evidence; to be persuaded without reason; to be convinced without argument; or to assent without conviction; but we would respectfully and earnestly solicit them, by the freedom, privileges and obligations of Liberal Christianity, and by their fidelity to these great truths, to listen, not indeed with blind partiality, but with a favorable regard to the evidence, reasons and arguments to be offered to them this evening.

Prof. H. Ware, Jr., said that he felt it to be a duty to express his interest in the object of the meeting, and his solemn and religious desire that it might be accomplished. He regarded the measure proposed as one step toward the discharge of that great duty, which we, as Christians and as men, owe to the religion which has blessed us, and our beloved country. We are under solemn obligation to God and conscience, to exert ourselves and do our share toward spreading through the land the principles of the Christian religion, and those moral influences by which alone our institutions can stand. By adopting the proposed measure, we shall do something toward discharging this obligation. Prof. Ware added, that the measure proposed must be considered as wholly independent of the person elected to perform the duty. Perhaps he would be unable to accept the trust. If so, some other individual must be found, and we should not allow the uncertainty respecting the man, to discourage our efforts.

[Our readers have here only a few leading thoughts of Prof. W's speech.]

Rev. Mr Brownson, of New York, said, though a stranger, he would claim the indulgence of the meeting, for he thought he might add some remarks which would not be uninteresting. He was from that West to which allusion had been made. He knew its character; and was sorry to add that religion had no strong hold upon the affections of the people. Were he to tell his deliberate opinion, he might shock those that heard him; still he feared he must say, that a majority of the people of the adult males of the Western States, doubt the divine origin of religion. He was well acquainted with the state of public opinion, and feared he did not exaggerate. Great exertions have been made to arrest the progress of infidelity, but those measures had been so ill-timed, ill-judged, and violent, that they had rather increased the evil they meant to cure. But the majority reject religion, not so much for what it is, as because they have become completely disgusted with that form of it which has been presented to them.

Mr B. sympathized with the objects of the meeting. He hoped an Agent would be sent. He was much needed. Powerful and widespread as infidelity might be, if Christianity could be presented in its native simplicity, in its purifying and ennobling character, it would be checked. Christianity, Sir, said Mr B., is not powerless. Let it come in its own character, and be presented, as it must be, living and breathing to the souls of the people, it will not fail to exert its omnipotence, to purify the heart, and ennoble the mind. He hoped the Agent would go. He would find in all the villages materials for liberal societies, respectable for numbers and character. This is true of Utica, which will soon become the capital of the State; of Auburn, of Geneva, Canandaigua, and many other places. These remarks will also apply to the State of Ohio, and indeed to the whole Valley of the Mississippi. The people of that part of our country, Sir, are bold and enterprising, with strong minds, and an ardent love for liberty. They are resolved to be free, and will by no means submit to a religious system, which enervates the mind, and checks all the higher and nobler exertions of intellect.

An Agent, Sir, will find in every village, through which he passes, two, three, four, and in some, twenty individuals, who are already prepared to receive the sentiments he carries, with interest. These will form a sort of nucleus around which Liberal Christianity may gravitate. Then might he be induced to receive and distribute liberal tracts, which would do great good. An Agent might also do much good by preaching. He would find frequent occasions, and would always be able to collect respectable audiences, if he be a man of popular talents. A milder and nobler form of religion would then be presented, before which infidelity would disappear.

Sir, I am exceedingly anxious you should send an Agent to the West. The people from that quarter look to you of this vicinity for assistance Sir, I bear with me a thousand voices to you for help. "Tell our Boston friends," said the liberal men of the West to me, on my leaving them, "tell our Boston friends our eyes are on them; we ask them to aid us to obtain that purifying form of religion which it is their happiness to profess." And, Sir, this must be done. If you would have those of your children who may emigrate to the West, surrounded by the pure influences of religion, rather than by infidelity, something must be done.

And, Sir, there is one reason, and a strong one, why something should be done. The form of Christianity now among them, will not be embraced. That form can never arrest the tide of infidelity. It is not only the ignorant who doubt; the higher orders of society are unbelieving as the lower. There are those who disbelieve, who are respectable for their characters and mental powers. These men never will embrace the religion now among them. They have fled to infidelity as a shelter from it. Nothing but that form of Christianity which is embraced so extensively here, and which the appearance of this audience proves to be so dear to the people of this city, will do it. Let your Agent go then, with this pure, simple, and attracting form, and the evil will be removed.

Sir, I am exceedingly anxious that this should be done. It cannot be said that religion should be abandoned. It cannot be wished that infidelity should spread. Sir, I know what infidelity is; I have felt its withering influence. Would you know what it is, do as I have done, stand by the side of a newly opened grave.—I have thus stood and seen my friend let down into the cold and silent earth, and said to myself, "that is his last end; there ends all that once moved with grace, spoke with wisdom, and glowed with love." And when I said thus, I felt a lone and withered being; night came over my soul, and all nature lost its charms,—the flower its fragrance, and the forest note its sweetness. Sir, if you would have such feelings prevail, do nothing to spread Liberal Christianity. But, Sir, if you would save our beloved country, have a pure atmosphere around all its children, that it may not add another to the nations which were, and are not, then do all you can for the spread of pure Christianity.

Prof. Palfrey followed: If the religious and moral state of the Western section of our country is as the gentleman who has just spoken represented it to be, (and I do not doubt it, though I am myself unacquainted with the facts,) there is reason why our sympathy and energy should be excited on their behalf. If we regard motives of policy merely, we shall awake to the subject; if we reflect that the West may possibly be the home of our children, and that, unless more than ordinarily fortified by religious principles, their morals may be sacrificed, we cannot be indifferent to the matter; if we consider the probable fact that within a few years political power will be strongest in that portion of our land, and that intelligence and integrity are essential to its safe exercise, we must feel a deep interest in all right methods of extending over that wide territory the influence of pure Christianity.

But it was not, he said, exactly in this point of view that he had regarded the measure which we were assembled to consider. For the West indeed we had reason to tremble; but he thought that New England itself claimed a portion of the benefit to be derived from the proposed Agency. Here too was a field for the labors of one who should devote himself to the duties of a General Agent, and it was a matter of the highest importance that a man of enlightened and liberal views of religion, and possessed of distinguished powers and a considerate zeal, should be immediately engaged in this service. He was aware, he said, that prejudices violent and strong existed against Unitarianism; but he knew also that there was something still stronger, and that was truth. Yes; truth was mighty and would prevail. He did not fear these prejudices, deep-rooted and strong as they were, when met by sound argument and powerful eloquence. What did experience and observation teach? Did not the success of the past afford encouraging pledges for the future? All knew the progress of just religious views in this city and neighborhood, and in two States on our Southern borders, and also in Maine and New Hampshire, the effects which had been produced by the Unitarian preaching of a few efficient young men, was at once highly creditable to them, and animating to all who wished well to the cause of Liberal Christianity. Nor only so. The very measures pursued by the opponents of Unitarianism afforded reasons to encourage the prosecution of the present plan of this Association, and gave promise of a successful issue. He alluded, he said, to revivals. Some, he knew, had their fears in encountering the influence of revivals; but he was not one of these. Revival operations had indeed produced striking effects; he did not deny that their results had sometimes been good; but he saw in their usual extravagance that which was making them unpopular in sober New England. Our community had long since begun to perceive, or at least to think that they perceived, their general evil tendency, and were growing tired of them. In consequence, there was now an increased demand on the exertions of Liberal Christians. Now was the time for such an Agent as this Association had in view to go forth and present juster views of religion. He desired to have Unitarianism offered in contrast with the prevalent theology, because it approved itself to the reason of intelligent men. All knew there were in every part of New England great numbers of such men, who, dissatisfied with what had heretofore been offered to them under the name of religion, would gladly receive and exert themselves to spread Christianity in the simplicity and purity in which we hold it. Shall we not try to meet the case of this large class of the community? Shall they be left to grow indifferent, if not to become opposed to the gospel? Sir, there is much to be done for New England, as well as for the West. Let us enter upon the work. Let us see to it, that we fail not in the duty we owe to the land of the Pilgrims—that fair inheritance bequeathed to us by those who thought no sacrifice too costly, and who like Paul held not even their lives dear to them, so that what they considered the truth as it is in Jesus might be furthered, as well as their civil liberties secured.

[We have not given the language, and, we fear, but very imperfectly the sense of Prof. Palfrey's address.]

Judge Story then addressed the meeting.*

Mr President,—I have heard with much interest the accounts, which the Reverend Gentleman, who has just spoken, has given us of the state of religion in the West, and all that he has said of the prevalence of infidelity there. I know something of that subject, from my personal intercourse and acquaintance with gentlemen from that interesting portion of our country. I have great reason to think that the statement which he has given is true. I have seen respectable men of fair and candid minds, who were under the control of this dangerous belief, or rather want of belief. I have seen many men who were open to reason and conviction, to whom reason had never as yet had an opportunity to bring conviction. Sir, the upper class of society there are said to be quite as much infected with doubts and unbelief as the lower; but there are many who may be said only to doubt and not absolutely to disbelieve. What is our duty to these men; intelligent and enlightened men upon all other subjects; men who exercise much power and influence in the community; men worth attempting to convince for the sake of others as well as of themselves. How shall we change a mischievous influence,—an influence greater and more dangerous in proportion to their talents and virtues, which throws a dark shade over society there—for the healthy and wholesome influence of a moral and religious life? This is not only a great but a feasible object. It is not the dream of enthusiasm but within the limits of practical every day experience. Shall we not undertake a measure which seems in every respect the best calculated for the purpose?

But, Sir, it is not the upper class of society only, that is affected with scepticism. The lower classes are now liable to the same desolating influences. In former ages it was far different. Then scepticism was in a great measure confined to the learned.—Then infidelity soared so high in mere abstract reasoning that few were within the reach of its appeals. It was for the most part suggested in forms of philosophical speculation far above the reach and capacity of the multitude. It infected but comparatively few minds. It arose from comparatively few minds. A great part of the writings of former days contained dark hints rather than open conclusions; hints of what might be, rather than assertions of what was; and in such a shape as to do little harm among the common people. It was chiefly contained in large and somewhat expensive works. But now it comes forth in a form suited to the meanest comprehension, and with many arguments and assertions calculated to mislead the ignorant, the credulous, and the unwary It is now spread over the land in the cheapest form of paper and printing, at an expense to suit the purses of the poorest. It comes forward in the penny pamphlet, to penetrate the cottages of those whose only possession is their hopes, and to darken and extinguish their belief. It sows doubt, which might be easily answered by the more enlightened, among those who cannot answer; who have neither habits, knowledge, nor capacity to examine at all; who have not the means and materials, if they had the ability for examination. It is a fact, Sir, that presses are now employed not in spreading the refined and misty speculations of infidel philosophy, but gross misrepresentations and bold assertions, which impose upon the understandings of the weak and ignorant, but would be easily repelled by enlightened minds.

Infidel societies even exist to support the preaching of the most dangerous doctrine, with the order and regularity of established worship, and under the solemn forms of religious instruction. Not only do societies of this sect exist in New York and elsewhere, but even in this metropolis. Both the upper and lower classes of society are infected with infidelity. Indeed, Sir, the extremes of society seem at the present time about to meet. The dark waters from below are rising up, while the stream above is flowing down to meet them. Who can contemplate without dismay the effects of such an union. The withering influence of scepticism begins by exciting doubts, and gradually leads on to an absolute disclaimer of religion! Many of these doubts originate from the form in which religion is presented to the mind of those, who are the victims of them. The indifference arising from the want of the regular administration of religious worship predisposes to such doubts.

These popular objections must be met differently from the learned objections which were urged in past times. No appeal to authority will silence them. Great learning and research would be lost on these objections. They must be answered by popular arguments as much as possible within the limits of practical knowledge and experience. The case is to be argued over again, not in the closet of the divine, but among the active thoughts and scenes of busy life. It is important that they should be done without delay. The constitution, the laws and habits of our country allow so great liberty to every individual, that without the restraints of religion and morality, nothing is safe. We have enjoyed the great privileges of civil and religious liberty; and if we fail to improve the or if we abuse them, they will be taken from us. We shall go on in the march of empire from infancy to greatness, and from greatness to decline and old age, as other nations have done before us, if, like them, we abuse or neglect our advantages. It seems a part of the plan of Providence, that every nation should at some era rise to a great eminence of light and knowledge; and if it does not preserve its virtue and public morality, to sink again by degrees and fall into the rough depths of degradation, and thus seal its own ruin. There is in fact a great principle of action and reaction in the moral world. It is thus God punishes those who abuse his gifts. These are words of solemn warning, and we know not how soon they may become the record of our own history. It yet remains in our power to determine the result. There is no safety for our land except in religion, and spreading its institutions from border to border. We are told by the gentleman who spoke last, that infidelity may still be opposed; that those who doubt, and many of those who deny it, may still be convinced. We are told by him, and many others, that the measure now proposed is the best for this purpose which could be proposed. We have effected other and similar objects before. We have bethels for seamen, "where," to use the words of that eloquent, devout and generous spirit for whom a church is now building in this city, "where, after the stormy voyage of life the seaman may find a safe harbor." I would also refer to another benevolent institution of the age, the mission to the poor of this city.—I have long known the gentleman who labors with such honor to himself and benefit to others in that office; he had always the same warm and generous affections, the same piety, the same self-sacrifice and devotedness to others. They may have been more developed to others since, but they were always known to me. What have been the fruits of these institutions? Has any one regretted that they have been founded? Has any one wished that the money applied to these purposes had been devoted to any other? The measure now proposed is similar in its nature, and in the character of its candidate, and wider and greater in the circle of its operations. The gentleman selected for this office has been commended by those to whom he is most thoroughly known; as remarkable for his earnest piety, his great disinterestedness, the warmth of his devotion, the elevation of his character, and his glowing and fervid bursts of eloquence. The many circumstances which render this office necessary, the fortunate opportunity for its establishment and usefulness, the great benefits which it promises, and the character of the man so worthily selected to fill it—all devolve upon us a great weight of obligation to carry this measure into effect. How much shall we have to answer for, if we should be disloyal to truth and duty, and unfaithful to our high trust. We should then take one step towards that abuse of privileges and that national decline from which no country has ever yet risen.

[Judge Story spoke upon some other topics, of which we have had no opportunity to obtain an outline.]

On motion of Hon. William Sullivan the meeting was adjourned to Thursday evening.

On Thursday evening, Oct. 25th, the Association again met, Rev. Dr Bancroft, President of the Association, in the chair. After prayers by him,

Rev. Mr Walker, of Charlestown, stated the object of the meeting, and proceeded to advocate it on the ground of information collected in a recent visit to the Western States. Multitudes there, he said, held substantially the same opinions with us, particularly as respects the strict unity of God. Our books and our controversies were almost unknown among them; they have their own books, and by the aid of these, with the Bible, they have come to their present conclusions. Thousands in that region would welcome our co-operation in spreading the light and spirit of Liberal Christianity.—Those who differ from us, are divided among themselves, and are not as yet combined against us, as in other places, and their opposition, of course, is less formidable. Recently gathered too, as they are, from the four winds, with all imagined diversities of prejudices and habits, mutual toleration is practised as a necessity. Party organization, and party espionage and surveilance have not as yet been carried there, as in older countries, to such an extent as to prevent individuals from reading, hearing, and thinking for themselves. A thousand influences of interest, and family connexions, and the pride of opinion, which make men or keep them exclusive, so long as they continue here, are not felt on the other side of the Alleghanies. The alarm about the spread, and threatened ascendency of the Catholic religion in the Western States, he believed to be without foundation. That sect, it is true, there as well as here, sympathizes in some degree, in the excitement of the times, and has made some converts, and spent considerable funds from abroad in building up literary institutions, which while they are the best in that region, will be resorted to by Protestants, and no longer. Respectable and influential laymen are also to be met with there, who adhere to the Church of Rome, not so much because they think it *true*, but because they think it *good*; which is more than they are willing to say of the fanaticisms that prevail around them These persons did not hesitate to say, that if they ever changed their religion, it would be for Unitarianism, as being the only system, which, laying out of view authority and tradition, could be defended by reason and scripture. The infidelity of the West is to be ascribed not so much to the want of religious sentiment, as of the proper means of information and conviction, and the wholesome restraints of public opinion. It exists chiefly and is most active in the higher classes of society, because they have been most offended and disgusted by the religious extravagances which they have witnessed. He was told even by persons who were Orthodox, that Unitarians, carrying with them the reputation of being rational, moderate, and well-educated, would be more likely than any other denomination to win over the Western skeptics and unbelievers to a cordial and practical faith in revelation. He also believed that the spirit with which Unitarian sentiments are commonly associated, and which they preeminently breathe, must recommend them to the people of the West. The distinguishing element of Western virtue is magnanimity. They will not even so much as go into the question of the truth or falsity of what strikes them as narrow or slavish. At a recent election in Kentucky, one of the candidates for Governor is presumed to have lost his election almost solely on account of suspicions, well or ill-founded, of his bigotry. Now, he said, is the accepted time. The people there are awake, enquiring, and open to conviction, unshackled in their minds, either by entangling alliances, or the influence of antiquated institutions, or the dread of spiritual censures or denunciations. After a very few years, there is reason to fear that parties will be formed, and as efficiently organized there as in the older States, and will present as unbroken a front, and men will act and think on the subject of religion in masses and not as individuals; and the present opportunity will be lost forever. Aware of this, other denominations are straining their efforts to the very utmost; and if we may not allow them to provoke us to anything else, let them provoke us to good works. The fields are white already to the harvest, and the reapers are entering in; and as it is admitted on all sides that there are fields on which we can labor more efficiently than others, religion, humanity, and patriotism alike require that we should be willing and eager to join in the noble enterprise.

Hon. William Sullivan then rose. This meeting, he said, is held to discuss subjects of the highest importance. From the facts and inferences, already presented, feelings have been excited of serious character, and in which all this assembly participate.—Among these feelings is that of *sadness*, that some descendants of a magnanimous race of men, seem to have become regardless of their lineage; that some of the immediate descendants of a brave and patriotic generation, have become indifferent, or ignorant, as to the civil and religious rights, which were painfully won, and joyously bequeathed.

The great object of the first settlers, and of their successors, was, and especially was it the object of the revolutionary patriots, that the people of this country might live free from tyranny of every kind, and from all political usurpation: that they might, (for no one doubted that they would, if they could) worship the Creator in full liberty of conscience; obey his laws in the natural order of society; and respect his rules in moral action. In short, it was their object, (and they thought it had been obtained) that there should be a lasting empire *here*, in which the law of sound reason, enlightened by pure revelation, should be the supreme law.

Yet, what is the prospect before us, even in this early day; and even before all who were active in the eminent efforts alluded to, have gone to the quiet of the grave?

Our associates, who have proved the deep interest which they feel in this prospect, have expressed their opinions with becoming zeal and sincerity. All who have heard them must be convinced, that whatsoever is worth having, must be gained by labor; that the labor of preservation is often more costly than that of acquisition.—No one who has listened here can doubt that our political, social, religious, and moral attainments are in danger.

If there be a remedy; if there be any means of rescuing this country from the evils with which it is threatened, we must begin in the land of the pilgrims. Without arrogating anything for the great and good men whose memory we honor under the name of Pilgrims, we may assert, that their principles, their morals, and their manners, lie at the foundation of all that we, in New England, have to be proud of. It was their respect for holy things, for the sabbath, for schools, for industry, for science, which has been so usefully felt in this our land; and which, those who have gone forth from among us, had imbibed, and have carried into other lands.

If those things, which are so vital to our prosperity; so indispensable to national prosperity; so justly entitled to honor and reverence, everywhere, among rational and free men, are in danger, let us not fear to speak out, that which we think is true; nor let us fear to do that which it becomes us to do, that which we owe to ourselves, and our followers, to do;—and if we fail, let us at least have the consolation, that this early blighting of the best of human hopes, could not have been prevented by us.

It may be insisted that we are unnecessarily alarmed; that the dangers spoken of, are imaginary. That there is no call for a combined effort to remedy any wrongs or errors. It may be insisted that no country was ever more secure in its blessings than this. We are met to consider whether there be any danger, now threatening the religious and moral institutions of the country. And what is the proof that any such danger exists? And if such danger be found to exist, what is the remedy?

To begin *at home*, we are told, that in this, our own city, there are schools *to teach infidelity*, and the theory of the grossest immorality; that the teachers are not apologists for human infirmity, ignorance, folly, and consequent errors and crimes; but teachers, that belief in divine revelation is an abuse of the human understanding; and that a total disregard of its moral precepts, is the surest mode of being happy. We are told that there are some in the land, who maintain that they,

* This sketch is taken from the recollections of others. The engagements of Judge Story did not permit him to furnish any sketch of his remarks.

and they only, comprehend the true meaning of the Old and of the New Testament, and their relation to each other; and that none who assume to comprehend the scriptures, should be regarded as Christians if they do not read, understand, profess, and worship like themselves. It is said too, that there are thousands who would thankfully receive such religious doctrines as they could respect as reasonable, and as being consistent with what they already know must be rational duty.

Beyond the limits of the New England States, it is said, there are thousands who have, alone and unassisted, attained to some*thing of* a reasonable comprehension of man's relation and duties to his Creator, and who are desirous of instruction; that there are millions, who have no religion at all, and who think there should be none, because they never heard of any to which they could assent.

But, what is all this to us, if it be so? May not one who fears nothing on account of his own sins, because all things are ordered and inevitable, be a good citizen? May not he who thinks the grave is the end of him, and that he is not to live beyond it, be a good citizen, husband, father, and friend? And whether he be so or not, what is that to us?

It is to us, *this*, that their virtues and prosperity, and their ignorance and errors, are interwoven with our own political and moral condition.

It is to us, *this*, that if they are incapable of supporting free institutions, social union, rational religion and good morals, they will founder and go down, and will inevitably carry us down with them.

It may be admitted that we have some interest in the moral character of those among whom we dwell; and denied that we have any like interest in those who dwell in other States, and afar off; and whom we know not and never shall know. No citizen within the United States is so remote from us, that we have not a direct interest in his moral and religious character, and in his intelligence. For, wheresoever he may dwell, he has something to do in choosing those who are to make laws for us. All act, in some manner, in the selection of those who perform duties under oath; and all of them may have duties to perform under oath, in which we may have an interest. What is an oath to him who has no sense of religion? What is moral obligation to him, who thinks that there are no laws but those which man can enforce; and and what are *these* to him if he can avoid their force? Who among persons of this description, ever felt the meaning of the prayer, *Lead us not into temptation*? Who among them ever felt the effect of the supplication, *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*? And who among them was ever moved to do, or not to do, in obedience to the divine command, *Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you*?

There are, near us and afar off, great numbers, who are not instructed in those things which we hold to be serious and important; and whose ignorance we ought to remove, if we claim the character of Christians. The religion which we profess commands us, that if we sincerely believe that we know the truth, and do find ourselves safe and happy in that knowledge, we should do all that we reasonably can do, to make it known to others. It is not only our *duty* to disseminate this knowledge; it is also our *interest* to do it, if we would preserve for ourselves and our followers, our inestimable privileges, our political and social relations.

Considerations of this nature have, for years past, moved divers of our thoughtful citizens to look around for some means to discharge the obligations of *duty*, and to satisfy the reasonable demands of *interest*.

They have done what they could to promote learning. They have done this, because they expect from learning, intelligence; from intelligence, pure religion; from such religion, good morals; and from intelligence, pure religion and sound morals, good fellowship and good citizenship. Money has been given to some extent, to educate men who would be worthy teachers, and to send them forth to their labors.

Great good has been done by these measures. But the teachers who go forth have to seek some establishment; and they are bound to perform duties, which fully occupy all their hours of labor, to the congregations over whom they are settled. Their influence is felt, but only in a limited degree; and those, who know best, tell us that *duty* and *interest* demand something more.

After long and conscientious examination, the intelligent men, who have digested this subject, are convinced (and they hope to convince others,) that the exigency demands the establishment of an AGENCY, as a distinct calling and employment by itself. Wherever this plan has been considered, it has met with approbation; and the only remaining measure is, to submit it, in the most public and general manner, to this whole community. This meeting has been called, and this discussion invited, as one of the modes of accomplishing this object.

The place of abode of this Agent, would be in this city.

He would correspond with the societies and individuals in New England, and beyond it, who should need his counsel and advice. He would be the medium through which all written and printed communications would be made. All that proceeded from him, would be received as entitled to confidence. He would send and recommend occasional teachers. He would go himself, whenever his presence would be useful. He would perform the duties of a clergyman, and would disclose and enforce the reasonable grounds of Christian faith and morality. He would bring all who are of this christian faith, however widely scattered, into the fellowship of Christianity, and make all, however distant from each other, and however poor and humble, rejoice in the assurance that they are not alone and insignificant; but that thousands and thousands feel as they do, and sympathize with them. He would make annual reports of his labors, and bring the whole Christian community into a knowledge of the various parts of which it is composed.

The elements of the proposed Christian alliance lie disconnected and scattered over this extensive country. The proposed Agency would associate and connect them together. In their present state, each part is strong or weak, only by itself, deriving no aid or power from other parts. Associated by this Agency, they would become ONE, and strong in proportion to the numbers which may constitute the unity. We often see, in this free country, the effect, for good and for evil purposes, of the union of many minds, and the direction of combined means, in accomplishing the intended object. There is no other effective mode of action for any purpose. The word *party* has an odious sense, only because of the evil which parties may do. Associations there must be, for religious and moral as well as political purposes, so that the good may counteract those which tend to mischief.

There may be objections to this plan; and if there be none among ourselves, who from delicacy and scrupulousness would raise objections, there may be others, not of our denomination, who will raise objections. Forgetful of what they do themselves, they will charge us with a systematic effort to build up a *sectarian dominion*.

If there be anything in this, it should be met and answered. Every one who gives his approbation, his time, or his money, to this great object, should conscientiously feel that he is doing right. No one is invited to express, or to feel, any disrespect for, or to interfere with any other sect; no one is asked to feel any sentiment but that of kindness and charity, towards any of his fellow-men; he is even to treat with tenderness, their honest errors, if he believes them to be such. No one here assumes to dictate to others, nor to address any who refuse instruction.

Whether we are a selfish and aspiring sect or not, must depend on the truths and principles which we wish our Agent to profess and to teach. If I comprehend what these are to be, they are the simple truths and principles of incorrupt Christianity; and the sound morality which flows therefrom. We assume:—

That in a country where no form of faith or worship is prescribed, and where every one may profess and practice as he sees fit, or forego all profession and practice, no religion can be an enduring and respected one, which human reason in its best estate cannot approve. Consequently, all mysterious and incomprehensible theories, which have nothto do with simple Christianity, will, eventually, be rejected, by all who are able to compare and to judge. That there should be many modes of faith and practice, is to be expected: but no authority has been given to any one denomination, to hold any other to account. Certainly there are excellent men, and excellent citizens, and (conscientious differences of opinion notwithsanding) acceptable Christians, in all the denominations. It is only when one sect assumes to be superior to all others, and disturbs the peace and order of society, by what it does, or would do, that others may, and ought to interpose. The tendency of well directed inquiry is to promote reasonable religion, or simple Christianity. The more candid and searching that inquiry is, the nearer will different sects be found to approach each other.

What is reasonable religion, or simple Christianity? The mysterious doctrines which some men have raised out of the *literal* history of the 'Fall of our first parents,' may not be essential to it. Some of these doctrines and kindred ones, have been a most serious obstacle to the progress of Christianity. I pretend not to know in what precise acceptation this part of the Bible ought to be received; that is, whether in its apparent literal meaning, or in some figurative one. The better opinion, is said to be the latter. One embarassment is removed by this mode of interpretation, as well as by the fact, that the learned concur in the opinion, that the term *atonement*, as used in the New Testament, means *reconciliation*.

A Christian must find, that his religious belief is consistent with the order of nature of which he constitutes a part. By the mere use of his senses, and by his daily experience, he will know what the order of nature is. Without stopping to notice proofs and illustrations, which are ever present to every reflecting mind, he is not a rational being who denies that this system came from a Supreme Intelligence.

No one can pretend to be a rational person, who does not perceive, that the Creator has assigned to him, his place in this system of being;—and he has but humble claims to have been an intelligent observer who has not found out that the Creator has established laws for mankind; and that these are as certain and unchangeable, as those which hold the planets in their spheres.

No rational, well-instructed person can doubt, that these laws must be learned by him, and that obedience is happiness, and disobedience, pain, sorrow, and remorse.

The mere light of reason, will satisfy any enquiring mind that there *may be* an immortal spirit in man, which will survive his earthly frame. He sees nothing more mysterious in this, than that the perfume of the rose, should survive the rose that gave it;—or that the food which one takes, should nourish him;—that the animal which was in its beginning a worm, in one element, should be transformed to a winged insect, in another. There is something too, in the common sentiment of all mankind, civilized or barbarous, that there is a life for man beyond the grave.

The Christian believes that there certainly is another life;—and that it is proved to him to be so, by the presence on earth of HIM, 'who spoke as never man spoke;' who verified his mission, by fulfilling prophecies, and by the performance of miracles; and, especially, by that of his death and resurrection.

A Christian believes that this Divine Teacher disclosed the true connexion between the Creator and his creature man; prescribed his duties; and left to him a code of moral laws in the New Testament, which is eminently beautiful, and appropriate to man's condition;—which dispels all doubts and difficulties; and rationally solves the mystery of human life; and which necessarily connects existence here with a state of accountability in another.

However men may perplex themselves with vain speculations, these, and such simple truths and principles as these, are the fundamentals of Christianity. It is such truths as these, that we would have our Agent teach; and is this promoting the dogmas and the dominion of a sect? Some men call these doctrines *Unitarianism*, and as such they attempt to bring them into contempt. So far as they affirm ONE ONLY LIVING AND TRUE GOD, evinced to human reason by the very order of the universe, and by the scriptures, they are *Unitarian*.

Our opinions are derided as *Liberal*, and therefore unchristian and irreligious. So far as they avoid the incomprehensible mysteries and unmeaning forms of man's making; so far as they assert the rights of conscience, and leave all men to judge for themselves; so far as they maintain that the scriptures, rightly interpreted, teach *that only* which is intelligible by human understanding; so far as they contemplate the DEITY, as a *merciful and beneficent* FATHER, who is terrible only to wilful transgressors; and consider man as entitled to dwell in gratitude and joy, for the very reason that he is a CHRISTIAN, they are *liberal*.

In teaching such doctrines, *Unitarians* wage no sectarian war. They reproach no one for reading, understanding, worshipping, or practising differently from themselves. They look not so much to what men *profess*, as to the motives of their actions, and to the effect which their actions have on human welfare.

Their vindication against all charges is, their modes of life and conversation in the world, (however less worthy and exemplary they be, than they ought to be;) their support of public worship, of charitable institutions, the promotion of all means of instruction, their piety to God, and their good will to men.

If assailed, and denied the rank of christians, *they do wage a war;* but it is a war of reason, of argument, and of self-defence; and they do, or ought to do this, in a christian manner.

Every feeling of duty and of interest, demands of us individually, and collectively, to do all that we can to bring such a religion into notice and respect

No people on earth have a better country than our own; there are no better people in any country; no political institutions so reasonable, so just, so well adapted to promote the common welfare.

We are not embarrassed, as other countries are, by the unnatural orders of society, and the arbitrary distinctions which have grown up under military power, and ecclesiastical tyranny, during successive ages.

We have no princes, no nobles, no dominant church, no restraints on industry, no inquisition into freedom of opinion; we have true liberty and equality, and all of it, that human society can ever know; and all this rests on the broad, pure, and natural basis, *that the whole people are the only sovereign which the country has, ought to have, or can have.*

Are not these things worth preserving? and how are they to be preserved?

By teaching the whole body of the people to know all that they can know, by schools, by the press, and by social intercourse;—

By making them intelligent and rational Christians;—

By making them believe and act from the belief that their security, welfare, and happiness are to be found in the practise of that cheerful morality and elevated piety which rational Christianity teaches.

Let us hope that such religion and morals will prevail in this country; and if they should, what country ever was or ever can be superior to this?

The land of well informed rational Christianity, and consequently of sound morality, must be the land of self respect; of domestic peace; of neighborly virtues; of reasonable laws; of exact justice; of political security; and of national honor.

If those who advise to the measure of a General Agency for the diffusion of Christianity are right, as they undoubtedly are, the two things which remain to be done, to give life and vigor to the measure, are to furnish the means of maintaining an Agent, and of choosing a proper one.

As to the Agent;—I will add nothing to what has been said on the selection of the Rev. Mr. GANNETT, but to express the hope that the means may be such as to induce that capable, earnest, sincere, and indefatigable promoter of Christianity, to extend the sphere of his usefulness; and that those who are daily witnesses of his usefulness will, from exalted and liberal motives, which would well become them, be among the first to establish the means by which his exertions may be felt through all this land, as well for their good as for that of all their fellow-citizens; and even in successive generations. For, this measure, *once well begun, will not stop.* It will meet the common sense of mankind. It will end when it is useless; that is, by leaving nothing to be done.

To begin well, there must be a fund which can be relied on for a series of years. And what is that sum to the whole community of Unitarian, Liberal Christians, compared with the great purpose to be accomplished?

Greater sums than that which is now wanted, have been given again and again, in this community, for purposes which will be little worth, if this country cannot be instructed in pure Christianity and in sound morality.

It is supposed that by permanent donations and annual subscriptions this sum can easily be obtained.

It is true, that the calls for subscriptions and donations are of frequent recurrence in our community. It is true, also, that in no community of equal population and means, is the amount given to public uses, and private charities, so great as in this.

But then we have the full reward for this noble and generous spirit. We are considered and respected by other communities, as eminently munificent.

Look into the condition of our city—into its public buildings, its charitable, its literary, its scientific institutions; all of which are intended for the benefit not of one, but successive generations. Consider the efforts which have been made, and are making, to diffuse general information and correct opinions among all classes. If no one had been willing to give, and to labor, what would have been the condition of our city, and of its inhabitants, at the present day?

We are so bound together in this country, that whatsoever affects one class of citizens has some effect on all others; no class can be benefited, no one can be injured, without extending the benefit or injury, in some degree, to all others.

The rich may comply at the same time with duty and interest by giving to this object. Their security depends upon enlightened and sound public opinion; on this opinion depends the preservation of all our institutions. The value of all property must depend on the national character, and the principles of the people. But the rich have another interest. They are to leave their wealth to their children; and they desire that their children shall be so instructed as to entertain a just sense of the value of wealth; and that they shall have their reasonable influence within, and be reasonably influenced by, an enlightened and virtuous community. They must do something to make the community, in which their children are to live, to be of such character.

The moderately wealthy have like motives, and in equal degree; for, if they would secure what they have or increase their possessions, they can do this only in a well regulated community. As to those who are to come after them, and the sort of community in which their children are to live, they have equal interest with the wealthiest.

There is a numerous class whose dependence is on labor of the mind, or the hands, or both, who acquire the means of daily subsistence, but who accumulate but little for heirs. This class depend entirely for success and independence, on the character of the community in which they live. These persons can afford to give something, as means of securing the certainty of continuing their vocations; which can only be in a community of laws, and wherein the true relations of society are duly respected and honored. With respect to children, and their condition, they have the same interest which belongs to the rich and the moderately wealthy.

Those who have no pretensions to wealth have an interest, and can do something. Their children may be wealthy; or may attain to any respect, and any honor, which this country offers to honorable ambition.

Lastly—I would appeal to charitable and beneficent WOMAN. Let her take to her very heart the truth, that whatsoever she is, and rejoices in being, she is, *in right of* THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. If she is a respected and happy wife, or hopes to be such; if she is a thankful and proud mother, or hopes to be such; if she would be esteemed and honored by our sex, and respected and beloved by her own; if she would leave her good name to worthy descendants, and have her precious memory to be the last impression which dies in the heart of her offspring, *let her remember, that this cannot be, unless she lives and dies in a religious and moral community.*

Rev. Mr MAY, of Brooklyn, Conn. said: Mr. President,—I am not a little embarrassed by the deep conviction I feel, that the measure now under consideration is one of peculiar importance. I would not have consented to speak at all on the subject, were it not that my situation has been and is such that I cannot help seeing the very great demand which has arisen for especial exertions, in behalf of religion, to be made by Liberal Christians.

We have heard, Sir, from some gentlemen who have addressed us this evening and the last, much about the condition of our western country. Others have told us, that in our Atlantic cities also, ay, in this metropolis of New England, a great increase of infidelity has become apparent. I am compelled to make a similar report of the state of things in that section where I reside—in Connecticut, familiarly called 'the land of steady habits,' embracing the community which has long claimed to be the most religious in our country. In all our towns, certainly all within the range of my observation, there are more or fewer persons who are skeptical. I do not say there are many who explicitly deny the truth of Christianity, and stand forth its avowed opponents; but every where there are those who have little or no respect for Christianity, as it is expounded by any of the sects with which they are acquainted, and who are not sufficiently interested in the subject to inquire for themselves what the religion of the gospel really is. They have confounded Christianity with this human system of doctrines or that; and having rejected the latter, they have but a very questionable faith in the former.

The more I consider this matter, Mr. President, the more deeply am I persuaded that a weight of responsibility has come to rest upon Liberal Christians, far greater than they appear to be prepared to sustain. Or, I may express my meaning better, perhaps, by saying, that a field of usefulness is now laid open to them, more extended than they are yet able and ready to occupy and improve. Certainly there are large numbers throughout our country, who will receive the gospel at the hands of no other class of Christians. Our Orthodox brethren are losing their influence, I apprehend, in a greater degree than it is reasonable they should. In many places there is a prevailing prejudice against every thing that is 'orthodox.' And yet it cannot be denied that many of our best men, most valuable members of society, are of that sect. But their excellences are overlooked, and their good evil spoken of, because of the unscriptural and irrational system of doctrines to which they adhere, and the more offensive system of measures which they have been pursuing in order to make proselytes. Their encroachments upon the freedom of the mind have awakened the spirit of resistance. Yes, Sir, many seem determined enough to withstand every thing that may in any way restrict the freedom of their minds, even while they are shamefully misusing it themselves.

Such being the circumstances of our situation, how imperious is the demand upon all Liberal Christians to exert themselves to the utmost of their ability in the cause of truth and righteousness! I would that all should unite, with one mind and heart, to bring men to Christ, without imposing upon them the peculiarities of any sect. I would that we were laboring with a single desire to bring ourselves and others into willing obedience to the two great commandments of our Master—'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;' 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' This is the sum of true religion, the religion of the Gospel. And those only who have the spirit of Christ will labor effectually to establish this religion in the world. He sought not his own glory. Oh! that we were all as devoid of selfishness in this matter as our Master was! Mr President, is it not owing to the loss of his liberal, disinterested spirit, that his ministers have not accomplished more in the cause of truth and righteousness? What can be more foreign from his example, than an overbearing, dictatorial manner? What more unlike him, than to demand the assent of the mind to any thing of which there is not sufficient proof? That infidelity, of which such frequent mention has been made this evening and the last, is owing, Sir, I am persuaded, mainly owing, to the attempts which have been made to compel the human mind to believe mystical, unintelligible dogmas, about which the Author of our religion said nothing. There are, I doubt not, many called Infidels, who would give a ready assent of the understanding and the heart to Christianity, as it was taught by Jesus of Nazareth; many who would not, could not deny that the character of our Lord is perfectly lovely, and that his precepts are full of divine wisdom and goodness. O, Sir, I cannot doubt that if our blessed religion were presented to our fellow-citizens and fellow-men every where, in its *original simplicity*, it would operate upon them with its *original power*. For there is in Christianity an adaptation of truth to the nature and the wants of man, which goes far to procure its acceptance. There is a hunger in man, which 'that bread that came down from heaven' alone can satisfy; there is a thirst in man, which 'the living water' alone can slake.

Mr President, if I know any thing about the purposes of this Association, our first wish, our main object is to bring men to the pure fountain of divine truth, rather than that they should depend upon those cisterns which human art has constructed. We have had much to say against the creeds and dogmas of some of our neighbors. I trust we have not been actuated by the desire merely to substitute our own for theirs. Highly as we may prize the opinions we have embraced, I am sure we prize the right of private judgment more. I am sure we are ready to recognize any one as a disciple of Christ, who we know is studying to learn what Christ taught; and we heartily acknowledge him to be a true Christian, who obeys the precepts and evinces the spirit of our Master. True, Sir, we have some sectarian feelings and prejudices. But I believe we desire to be rid of them altogether; and I dare to aver before the world that we already have less of them than any denomination of Christians that I am acquainted with.

But whether this commendation of Unitarians be just or not, sure am I that the great principles which we advocate are of the highest importance, and that the condition of our country and the church requires we should act upon these principles with redoubled energy. This Association has already accomplished much in the cause of christian liberty and divine truth. But every year since it was formed has widened the sphere of its operations and its usefulness—and now nothing is more obvious, to those who are particularly acquainted with its situation, than that it needs the entire devotion of one mind and heart at least. I rejoiced, Sir, when I heard the proposal to institute a permanent Secretary and Agent. It seemed to me the very thing we needed to give efficiency to our operations. Those gentlemen who have hitherto served this Association have done much, and done it well. They have done much more than they ought to have done without remuneration—and at an expense of time and strength they could ill afford to spare from their other duties. Why, Mr President, should any think it unreasonable in us to ask for the devoted services of a competent individual, seeing that all corporate and general concerns have been found

to be best provided for, when committed to the especial charge of as few individuals as can take care of them?

Rev. Mr Brownson, rose and said:

Mr President: I ought to apologise for intruding a second time upon the notice of this audience, but so great is my interest in this subject, that I cannot forbear. Those who have lived, and only lived, in this enlightened metropolis, cannot conceive with what anxious interest this movement is regarded by those situated as I have been. What can an Agent do? Rather ask what cannot an Agent do, to arrest the progress of infidelity among those who are still disposed to listen to his views, and some who are prepared to embrace them. How long they will be so disposed, God only can tell,—the present time only is our own. When I entered this church, and listened to the solemn tones of that organ, I felt all its power; but there are sounds more powerful than those of the organ; the accents of sympathy from those who have a common faith produce a deeper and more thrilling interest in the breast of him, whose religious opinions are vilified and sneered at by those around. He feels feeble, solitary and desolate, and has not confidence to avow his faith, and to do all that he can to defend it;—he conceals his thoughts in his own bosom. Man so situated, has no moral courage, he gives way to despondency. Go to him by your Agent, assure him that other hearts beat in unison with his, let him feel the power of religious sympathy, and his confidence returns. We want, Sir, an agent of high moral character, to dart the lightning of moral courage into the hearts of the faithful but desponding believers,—to give Christian independence to him who before dared not to speak in favor of his sentiments.—We want an Agent to collect individuals into a body, and bring the scattered sheep into the fold; to act upon them by the force of sympathy and the moral power of character.

This appeal is made for one of the noblest objects within the sphere of mere human duty. It was a proud day for this city, when Faneuil Hall rang with the accents of Quincy, Otis, Warren, Adams, and many others; when the spirit of Independence which was cradled there, breathed upon the world. The fire which was there kindled, spreads its light from nation to nation, till it shall make the world free.—But what is political without mental and spiritual freedom? Bind my limbs with chains, task my body to the basest uses of servitude, if my thoughts are free I am a free man;—but if my mind is contracted by ignorance and prejudice, my moral courage repressed by reproach and intimidation, my religion shackled by superstition, I am indeed a slave. Nothing but pure Christianity can sustain freedom,—superstition has always prevented it,—infidelity will debase it to a lawless licentiousness. Let the city which kindled the flame of political liberty, send forth the still brighter light of religious freedom, to cheer the hearts of her pilgrims, wherever they wander. This city has been called to a high trust, the care of the political rights of man, and she fulfilled it; she is now called to the higher trust of defending her moral and religious rights. Now is the moment of danger,—a little longer and it is too late,—the responsibility is awful,—God avert the day when she shall be wanting to her high destiny.

Judge Story, then concluded as follows:*

Mr President,—I rise with regret, to occupy more of your time, of which I have already occupied so much within these walls. No man who is occupied in the pressing duties of a profession, can fail to know how painful it is to come here with a mind worn down by incessant labor and without opportunity for reflection, which belongs to so important a subject, and then to feel that he occupies the space which might be more worthily filled by minds more highly gifted and better prepared.

We are asked, Sir, what will this agency do? what great things will it do? Before we answer, we may remark that all great things grow out of small beginnings. The first foundations of every great undertaking are small. Christianity was built at first on a more limited foundation than the present measure.—The early Christians reasoned not in the way which the question supposes. They considered how much could be done even by a humble few. They labored in a narrow circle, and trusted that great things would follow. The martyr asked not what great things will my death accomplish, but only asked if it was his duty to die.

What can we do to sustain Christianity? I answer much, in every way. Every age has its trials, and is called to its peculiar efforts, and its peculiar danger. The course and direction may change, but there is always an ample field for effort, and trial, and danger. Our own age is one of unexampled tendencies,—we hear much of the march of intelleet. Let us weigh and consider this; if there is much good in motion abroad in our day, there is also much evil. Credulity changes easily to skepticism, and there are always alternate seasons of activity and relaxation. We must find an answer for the skeptic, and a remedy for skepticism. The age of authority is past; whether this is, Sir, better or worse, is not not the question. There is no longer any implicit reverence, for settled doctrines, and high names. Men have ceased to respect any institution, or any principle merely becase it is established. It is rather a season now for suspicion than respect. Men have found out, that many established maxims have failed, many theories have been disproved; and they begin naturally to infer that others are equally unfounded. Nay, they are apt to assume that the presumption is now against what has been long settled as practical truth in government and religion. They seem to think that everything ought to be reasoned out anew, and subjected to new tests and new scrutiny. What a demand under such circumstances, for thought and exertion must there be in such an age! The Christian is not now permitted to take off his armour; he must, like the knights of chivalry in other times, sleep with it on, and be always armed, with his lance in rest, or ready for combat. Every institution which supports great principles must now be sustained. Where the enemy for civil or religious institutions is found, there must their defenders also be found.

* This sketch also has been made from the recollections of others, the same reasons preventing Judge Story from furnishing his own.

Intelligent men will often ask what ground there is for alarm? why should we unite and form associations and agents to support Christianity? It is from God and it can never be in danger. Has it not grown up under his protection; is it not extending its light over Asia, and even now dawning upon Africa? They say or affect that nothing need be done for Christianity, because it is the ordination of God. It seems to me that such men reflect little upon the scheme of Providence. As in the natural world every thing gravitates towards every other thing,—so mind acts on mind, and gives and receives impulses, though it belongs to God alone to point out the manner. No man ought to escape from his own duty, by preaching the doctrine of a reliance upon Providence. If the support of what we believe to be true, is a duty, then the present call is one beyond all question. Sure it cannot be doubtful whether it is worthy of patronage. It is always our duty as far as we can to follow out the designs of providence? Some truths strike the mind at once, and others are the results of reflection, and others are known only by the strong pressure of experience. Human society is never stationary; it always goes backwards or forwards. It is equally true in regard to arts, to sciences, and to civilization. Whenever an opportunity is given for improvement, we must seize it; and move forward, and we are constantly called on to watch for such opportunities in the order of providence.

I have thrown out these general suggestions, but I would now consider some reasons which in an especial manner urge us to aid this undertaking. We are called Unitarians. I for one, do not object to the name; I am proud of it. The doctrines associated with this name, contains truths by which I am willing to live, and by which, I trust, I shall be willing to die. I believe these doctrines founded in immutable truth. I desire to see them propagated, not, indeed, for the sake of a triumph over others; but because I am persuaded they are full of consolation, and hope, and immortality. Others may believe other doctrines to be true; and they ought to act according to their consciences. I make no objection to this, provided it does not involve uncharitableness or persecution for opinions. But the objections of those who differ from our opinions, can furnish no excuse for our not aiding the cause of Unitarianism. I have said that the undertaking may seem small in the beginning; so are all other undertakings. So was the Bible Society, which now sends millions of Bibles in all languages to enlighten, instruct, and comfort the desponding and the suffering, all over the world. So were the Sunday Schools, now the most popular institution among all sects; they were begun by a humble printer, in an obscure town, for the instruction of a few poor children. Institutions like these, are now deemed second to none, in importance. These are the greatest security for the happiness of the rising generations, for maturing their earliest principles in the best form. How trifling indeed, are the contributions required for these purposes compared with the tribute, which we continually pay to the polite arts and sciences, and refinement; yet of how infinitely greater importance are they than all accomplishments! What are all arts, science, and refinement without moral principles? How many mothers would give thousands to secure deep moral and religious principles among their children. How many, whose parental sorrows have brought them to the grave, have had the deepest reasons to lament that their children had not the means of religious instruction! How many of them would have been saved from the most bitter agony by the preventive power of moral and religious institutions!

I consider this Agency as a great good, a great operative power. It concentrates and gathers our means, to spread them out again over the moral surface of society, thus promoting great fertility and wider happiness. I do not press this subject so much for our sect, as for Christianity. I wish that Unitarianism may spread,—not so much to make more devoted Unitarians, as to make more Christians, by its influence among those who will never become Christians in any other way. My belief in this respect coincides with that of those who have spoken before me. I know that Christians of other denominations sincerely desire that this measure may prevail, because we shall bring many within the fold of Christianity, who will be allured by no other sect: many, who have no wish to withhold their belief if their doubts could only be satisfied. It is truly a deed of mercy to relieve bodily wants and sufferings. But how much more merciful to save the mind from moral desolation!

When one follows a wife or child to the grave, how sad and painful must be the returning step, which leaves all behind with an eternity between him and hope. Sorrow under such circumstances must sink deeply into the heart. It must aggravate every calamity and deaden every joy by the consciousness that there lies not in the present any hope of consolation. It was but a few months ago, in the course of my reading, that I met with a short letter of Xenophon to a friend on the death of a child, and it sunk into my heart. What was his language? "Death in my opinion is neither good nor ill, but the end of life. Birth is the beginning of man's pilgrimage; death the end. He died as all men, though never so unwilling, must die. But to die well is the part of a willing and well educated person."—Such was all that one of the wisest and the best of heathen philosophers could say, on such a subject. He saw not and felt not that there was a glorious resurrection to life and immortality. All beyond the grave was to him darkness and silence. But to Christians the grave is only the door to eternity. It opens upon immortal, unchangeable scenes. How delightful would be the thought, could we, by our exertions, bring such minds as Xenophon's, within the reach of Christian consolations.—Is the plan not worthy of Christian support in a Christian age? We think that it would be a great benefit to New England. There are many faithful Christians of our own denomination in New England who want a little sympathy and ask more light—what answer can we give? Can we stop to reason upon the policy of such aid? Then again, as has been justly observed, there is the West, in which dwell men from all parts of our country. The population has not as yet settled down into fixed castes and sects. There are great masses without any combination of opinion. The elements of these masses are not yet solid; they are all in a glow; they may be melted together and moulded so as to be of inestimable good to all our country. In twenty-five years the country West of the Alleghany will be the controlling power of the Union. "Westward the art of empire rolls its way." We must submit to our destiny.—But our great duty is, to provide while we may for the due operations of that power in its most beneficial form. The dangers to our common country can no longer be disguised or passed by. They were foreseen years ago by a few; they are now seen by all. I speak of the dangers to our Union. Is it not our duty to create, if we may, a great moral force in the West to sustain it? Shall we not connect them to us by every tie of affection and principle? All will say that we ought. But we can do more; we can connect them with us by common institutions of religion and morality. We can bind them to us by the force of the strongest obligations—religious obligation. It is here that there is the widest field for exertion; and the noblest for enterprize.—Our duty is to enter upon it. I might say it was almost a paramount duty. It is a great and noble purpose for ourselves and posterity. Will any one ask what shall we do? Will any one think that we have done all, when we have done nothing? Shall we be wise for time or for eternity? for the passing hour or for all ages? for ourselves alone or for all eternity? In my judgment no time should be lost. It may be soon too late. Events may hurry us on, we know not whither. The means and the motives are before us. If we feel the force of Christian obligation or even of worldly calculation and expediency; if we think of our children or even of ourselves in any measure, as we ought, we shall do all that is necessary to effect this great measure. Transient as is our own existence we may lay the foundation of a superstructure, which shall endure to the latest ages.

On motion of Hon. William Sullivan, it was unanimously

Resolved, That in the opinion of this meeting, the establishment of an Agency of the American Unitarian Association is a measure so important to the best interests of Liberal Christianity, that it has strong claims for aid and support upon our religious societies, and upon individual Christians; and that we cordially approve the intended application of the Association to our several parishes in this city and throughout the country.

A SUMMARY

OF THE ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF A GENERAL AGENCY OF THE

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

The reports of the discussions respecting the General Agency of the A. U. A. are so imperfect, that it has been thought expedient to add a summary of the facts and arguments relating to that important subject.

1. *With regard to the management of the affairs of the Association.* As it has been supported to this time by your countenance and patronage, we shall assume, that you are convinced of its usefulness. That this may continue in its extended and extending circle of operation, it is indispensable that some change should be made in its management, which has been hitherto conducted by a Committee of gentlemen engaged in other professional duties. All great public interests among us, are usually committed to *individuals*, and require their whole time and attention. Experience has shown this to be the only means of success. No man of business would invest his capital in any company for Banking, Manufacturing, and Insurance, if the management were to depend upon the voluntary attention of each stockholder in his turn, much less, if upon his moments of leisure. The affairs of no office of public trust and confidence could be administered in this way. The result of all practical experience has been to require all the time and talents of paid and responsible agents. Religious and charitable associations have found the same means to be indispensable, and now confide the management of their affairs to persons making it their business, and selected on account of their fitness for those duties. In proportion as all undertakings extend themselves, the change must be sooner made; and our own denomination has now so much increased in numbers and spread over such an extent of country, that we can no longer delay it. If we withdraw from all other pursuits, those ministers of religion, to whom its local interests are confided, we should for a stronger reason, release him from all other claims, to whom we entrust its general interests. We have many to think and act for the interest of the parts, we want one to act and think for the good of the whole; and if other duties are incompatible with the first, they are still more so with the last. At least one mind free from all other claims should be devoted to such an almost boundless circle of duty. We proceed to consider the subject more in detail.

2. *How are the calls from all parts for aid, advice, and information to be answered.* A knowledge of all the parts of our extensive country, their circumstances, habits, manners, and feelings are necessary to do this with effect. It can only be the result of visits and personal observation incompatible with the local duties of a minister. The information must be accurate, and the aid suited by a discriminating judgment, to the real wants of the applicant. The advice must be the result of much practical experience, and a thorough acquaintance with the circumstances. Opportunities of usefulness escape if not embraced, and will wait for no man's leisure. A mind burdened with other cares, and time unwillingly taken from paramount obligations, or moments of leisure, are of little avail for these purposes. To trust to these for the means of doing good is to defeat our own objects.

3. *The correspondence of the Association.* The preceding remarks apply also to this subject, and delay or hurry may be equally fatal to its objects. We address so many men of business, who know the importance of correctness, promptitude, and good information in correspondence, that we need not labor this point. Would any one of these leave his letters to depend upon the kindness of a neighbor, and to be answered at his leisure? This branch of the business of the Association has so increased, that no professional man will much longer undertake it at all. It cannot be diminished in extent, as every one of our friends has an equal claim. If partially or carelessly performed, the question will not be about the Agency, but the whole usefulness of the Association; about the confidence and respect which it inspires, and the benefits inseparable from these. The Bible society, and other religious and charitable associations have found it necessary to adopt the measure now proposed.

4. *Publications.* Here also an exact acquaintance with the wants of every part of our country, and still more the wants and circumstances of the time, is important to success. The Agent must know all persons, who can furnish useful papers for tracts, and as far as possible, the writings themselves, which it is desirable to obtain. He must add to, take away from, and alter them until they are suited to the purpose intended, and superintend and correct the press. Tracts are so essential to a dissemination of truth, and have already been the means of so great and extensive a good, that the importance of this duty can hardly be properly appreciated without experience. The Agent must also prepare accounts of the state of religion, the efforts, wants, and means of supply among our denomination everywhere, and embody them in the general annual report. Can all this be expected of one already burdened with professional duties?

5. *Communication and Intercourse.* We mean now, not merely correspondence, but all the means of that interchange of feeling, opinion, and information, so necessary to effect a common object. These are as important to the life and vigor of a cause, as the circulations are to the life and vigor of the body. With it, there is unity of thought, feeling, and action; without it, there is nothing in common, but division and weakness. With it we are "one body, members one of another;" without it, we are so many separate individuals without confidence, resources or strength, for any purpose however good. The very thought of good men strengthening and binding themselves together for the support of enlightened views of God and duty is so elevated and inspiring, that if this agency effected no other purpose, it would be above all human estimate of its value. Every body of men associated for whatever purpose, know the value of united effort. In our country, public opinion controls everything. As the great secret of military success is to bring the greatest number of men, the greatest physical force, to bear on a single point, so the great means of moral success is to bring the greatest number of minds, the greatest intellectual force, to bear on a single point. Without complete communication through the whole, both are equally impossible. There are many among us who have talents, learning, and influence, and want only opportunity and excitement to be useful. An Agent would soon find means to bring these into action, and we know not how much strength and encouragement the cause of religion may derive from their character and exertions. These are general considerations which affect all denominations, but our own more than others; for as they will not unite their efforts with ours, we are made the more dependent upon our own union and resources. We need not enforce the idea, that a permanent General Agent, visiting all parts of our country, corresponding with all, sought by all, both to give and receive advice, assistance and information, known to, and knowing all our most intelligent and influential religious men, would be the best organ to effect all these purposes.

6. *What can an agent do in New England.* He can promote this union of thought, feeling and action, of which we have spoken, among our religious societies and individuals. There are members of our denomination scattered among others, and without means of hearing, what they believe to be truth, and hitherto beyond the reach of our fellowship. He can speak or send sympathy and encouragement to these, impart light and knowledge, confirm and strengthen their adherence to truth, and perform something of the great duty, which we owe to each other. There are many indifferent to the forms of religion around them, and in this way to all religion, who neither deny nor assent to anything, and make no part of the strength of any denomination. A word spoken in another manner may bring some of them back to a sense of their religious obligation. Many are opposed to the opinions around them and to the means taken to disseminate them. Whether these measures are best and most expedient or the reverse, their effect upon these persons is to repel them from all religion. Infidelity, though less open, is also busy, circulating its cheap tracts, undermining the religion and morals of the ignorant, and sometimes of those who should know better. Here, in the land of the Pilgrims, the question has been submitted to a law officer for a legal opinion, whether a society for preaching and hearing infidel doctrines was not a religious society, and thus having a right, that its place of meeting should be exempted from taxation. To all of these classes it is not too late for us to speak where others might speak in vain. We have fewer difficult points to defend and may make stronger appeals to human reason. We are not obliged to maintain and explain to the ignorant, mysteries which the learned cannot understand. Infidels are less likely to impute to us absurdity or contradictions. And we may therefore hope success in defending the cause of religion, where others might fail. All these things prove that an Agent may do much in the New England.

7. *Why should we send an Agent to the West. Because its present state demands it.* It is said that much infidelity exists there among the upper as well as among the lower classes; among men of intelligence and influence, who are opposed to the forms of religion now existing there. It is said by those acquainted with the country, that in many parts a majority of the population doubt or deny the claims of revealed truth. Much of this evil is occasioned by their disgust at religious extravagances, and by the want of Christian worship and ordinances, of proper means of information and conviction, and a wholesome tone of public feeling on these subjects, and thus two millions of persons frequent the worship of no denomination. *Because there is much to hope from this measure.* The shades of different denominations are little marked. There exist great masses without any combination; the elements are yet in a glow and may be melted and moulded into any shape. Many who doubt all religious truth do not yet deny it, and many who deny it are still willing to consider and may be convinced. Reason has not failed to persuade them, for it has not yet spoken to them. There are a considerable number of believers of our own persuasion; two, three, four, or twenty in each village to form a nucleus to societies. Many more are seeking to hear our doctrine, of which so much has been said, and in some places there are now sufficient materials for liberal societies, and everywhere it is easy for any man of talent to obtain an audience. Many are now looking to us for the means of hearing the truth. *Because there is much to fear from the neglect of this measure.* What safety have we, if so large a part of our union should go on to confirmed infidelity and live without moral or religious influences. They have great weight now, but it is calculated that in twenty-five years they will be the majority of our nation. Our children will go there to be exposed to these dangers, and it will then be too late to attempt to bind them to us by the bonds of religion and morality. Parties will be organized, and interests, connexions, and pride of character, will oppose us. In all the circumstances of the present and all that is to be hoped or feared for future, there are reasons for the measure. These are not the arguments of advocates, but the testimony of witnesses; men, who have examined, considered, and determined for themselves; who are well acquainted with individuals, society generally and all the circumstances of the case.

8. *This measure is a duty, we owe to the general interests of religion and good morals.* Every denomination is bound to do all within its power, among those within its influence, to advance these great interests. Every one must fulfil these obligations according to the dictates of his own conscience. All the different sects in various ways have done something towards this end beside the mere support of public worship, and their missionaries and agents have done much good. If what we hold to be truth has any power to make men better and happier in this world and the next, our means are such as to require from us a liberal contribution to these purposes. If we believe that our views inspire a more enlightened piety, and better promote religious freedom and knowledge, then it imposes upon us a stronger obligation to be faithful to the cause of truth.

9. *Hence we add that this is not a sectarian measure in any objectionable sense.* It is not its object to interfere with the rights of others. We mean to extend fellowship, aid, and encouragement to societies and individuals of our own denomination, to gather up what belongs to no sect, to awaken the indifferent and convince the unbelieving, and to offer the means of learning the truth, to all who seek it. We should be unfaithful to our obligations, if we should refuse or neglect to do this. If these objects are sectarian, then the first preachers of the Gospel were such. If our ends are not sectarian, the employment of a General Agent, or any proper means to attain them will not make them so. We shall be told that such an organization has been abused to sectarian purposes. So have preaching and all the means of religion; everything useful in life, even Christianity itself; but their abuse is no argument against their use. Churches and individuals scattered among those who are hostile to them, without union and intercourse among themselves, are driven into extremes by this hostility. But if they become united and confident, they feel their relation to their friends, more than to their opponents, and are strong enough to practice moderation. No one can doubt, which will be most sectarian. If there were no other argument, the character of the candidate is a sufficient security; but in fact, without departing from the principles of our denomination, we cannot become sectarian in any bad sense of the word.

10. *We also owe a duty to posterity.* Intelligence gives value to property, but public morality alone renders it permanent. In all countries, where the government or the people have not been restrained by its influence, property and personal rights have been insecure and industry palsied. The Inquisition in Spain, the Revolution in France, and Despotism in Turkey produced this effect. Our civil and religious freedom and the security of our persons and property were the work of a past generation. They are a sacred trust to be transmitted to posterity. If we bequeath our property to our children without this security, we do them little kindness. We are still more bound to hand down to them those enlightened views of religion, which we value so much for ourselves, and to support every measure, which will give them a wider influence and greater strength and permanence.

We have presented these views of the necessity and obligation of supporting this Agency, not as our own opinions merely; they have been sanctioned by the private judgment of intelligent men; and the result of their deliberations with each other; by a meeting of gentlemen from all parts of the commonwealth, by several select and public meetings in the city, and by the general approbation of our brethren in the country. We profess to believe in the simple and pure christianity of the days of the apostles; it has the same claims now, as then, for sacrifice and exertions. We are to show the Christian world the value, which we put upon truth, and that we are not necessarily indifferent to our own faith, because we are liberal to theirs. In proportion to our means and the importance of the object, the claim upon us for pecuniary aid is small. To a community so distinguished throughout our land for its benevolence, and its generous care of all great public objects, an appeal so sustained by both interest and obligation, cannot be made in vain.

*** There will be a meeting of the friends of the American Unitarian Association, at Lexington, on Wednesday next, to consider what shall be done in Middlesex County, to promote the objects of that Society. The Auxiliaries to the ParentAs ociation, established in the different religious societies throughout the county are requested to send delegates to the meeting, and all Unitarian clergymen in the county, are also requested to attend with such laymen from their respective congregations as may feel particularly interested in the occasion. The meeting for business will commence at ten o'clock, A. M. The public meeting in the church will commence at half past one o'clock, P. M., when addresses may be exected from several gentlemen.

*** We shall give seasonable notice of the time of the meetings at New Bedford, and several other places.